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**General debate on national experience in population matters: assessment of the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development**

## Statement submitted by International Planned Parenthood Federation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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## Statement

The International Planned Parenthood Federation welcomes the priority theme of the forty-seventh session of the Commission on Population and Development.

Through its 152 member associations in over 170 countries, the International Planned Parenthood Federation strives for a world in which all women, men and young people have access to the sexual and reproductive health information and services they need; a world in which sexuality is recognized both as a natural and precious aspect of life and as a fundamental right; a world in which choices are fully respected and where stigma and discrimination have no place.

### Introduction

The International Conference on Population and Development was a milestone in the history of population and development. By demonstrating the interrelationships between population, sustained economic growth, health, education, economic status and women's empowerment, the Conference participants recognized the need to promote policies that support sustainable development. It was also the first time that world leaders recognized the concept of reproductive rights and committed to ensuring access to reproductive health, including sexual health, for all, without discrimination.

This is a significant year; as the operational review of the implementation of the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development draws to a close, 2014 presents an opportunity to reaffirm and reprioritize the issues emerging from the Conference. The Commission on Population and Development remains the primary platform for addressing and advancing these issues, and for holding Member States accountable for their implementation of the Programme of Action.

The International Planned Parenthood Federation calls on Member States to recognize that the five challenges identified below are priority areas for action to save lives, empower individuals and improve sustainable development outcomes. We urge Member States to work with civil society, communities, parliamentarians, the private sector and the international community to ensure that the necessary policies, resources and programmes are in place to realize the sexual and reproductive rights of individuals, ensuring access to information and services and that all individuals are empowered to make informed choices about their bodies, free from discrimination.

### Challenges

*Sexual rights and human rights*

As stated in the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development of 2013, sexual rights are fundamental to sustainable development. This includes the right to a safe and full sex life, the right to take free, informed, voluntary and responsible decisions on one's sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity, without coercion, discrimination or violence, and the right to information and the means necessary to safeguard one's sexual and reproductive health. In many parts of the world, these rights are denied or not respected equitably.

Currently, one in three women have experienced violence, making gender-based violence one of the most pervasive human rights violations. Women

who have experienced violence tend to be more than twice as likely as non-abused women to have poor health, including reproductive health, and both physical and mental problems. They also have an increased risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

Although 158 countries have implemented laws to increase the legal age of marriage to 18, an estimated 67 million girls are married before their eighteenth birthday. Ninety per cent of the 41 countries where early marriage affects more than 30 per cent of girls have expressed a commitment to address the issue, according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Turning commitments into reality requires civil society, parliamentarians, legislators, communities and other stakeholders to implement policies that protect the sexual and human rights of girls and young women. Between 2005 and 2012, the International Planned Parenthood Federation contributed to 556 policy or legal changes in support of sexual and reproductive rights in 136 countries.

*Access to family planning services*

Throughout the world, disparities in income, geographic location and migration opportunities limit access to sexual and reproductive health services. Worldwide, 222 million women want to space or limit childbearing but cannot gain access to the contraceptives to do so. Meeting this need for contraceptives would avert 218 million unintended pregnancies in developing countries, which in turn would avert 55 million unplanned births, 138 million abortions (of which 40 million would be unsafe), 25 million miscarriages and 118,000 maternal deaths, according to the Guttmacher Institute. A failure to meet the need for sexual and reproductive health services and family planning contributes to mortality and morbidity and reduces women's social and economic participation. In 2012, the International Planned Parenthood Federation provided services to 45 million people, 80 per cent of whom were marginalized and underserved, including by providing 52.7 million contraceptive services, which averted 4.9 million unintended pregnancies. This demonstrates the critical role of civil society as a service provider, making available services to communities beyond the reach of health systems.

*Access to abortion*

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), every year 47,000 women die from undergoing unsafe abortions, and since 2003 the incidence of unsafe abortion has increased. Mortality from unsafe abortions accounts for 13 per cent of maternal deaths; it is one of the three leading causes of mortality. Removing legal and policy barriers in order to increase access to abortion services will have a huge impact on reducing maternal mortality and accelerating progress towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goal No. 5.

With few exceptions, most countries' criminal laws place restrictions on abortion. Service providers and women's lack of awareness of the legal status can severely limit access to related services. This places women seeking abortions at risk. Restrictive laws are not associated with lower abortion rates; they only lead to unsafe abortions. Restrictions mean that the well-off can buy safe services, while the poor resort to dangerous methods. The high cost of treating complications of unsafe abortions forces women and their families into even greater poverty. In addition to

the risks to women's health and lives, legal prohibitions on accessing abortion services can place women at risk of imprisonment.

The International Planned Parenthood Federation supports access to safe abortion services and promotes a woman's right to choose. In 2012 we successfully advocated for 20 national legislative and policy changes that increased access to safe and legal abortion services. Civil society has a vital role to play in monitoring and protecting the rights of individuals, and in working with Governments to ensure rights-based policies.

*Adolescents and comprehensive sexuality education*

The present generation of young people is the largest in history, presenting many opportunities for the future. However, today's adolescents face many challenges to their rights. Most young people in developing countries live in poverty and lack access to youth-friendly health-care services. Worldwide, one in five women has given birth by the age of 18, one in three in the poorest parts of the world. Half of new HIV infections occur among those aged 15-24; in sub-Saharan Africa, young women are three times more likely to be living with HIV than young men. Increasing access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services and creating a policy and legislative environment that recognizes and protects the rights of young people and their access to comprehensive sexuality education will go a long way towards reducing the burden of ill-health and ensure that the next generation will be healthy, empowered and able to make informed life choices.

As stated in the Montevideo Consensus, comprehensive sexuality education should recognize the emotional dimension of human relationships and should respect the evolving capacity of the child and the informed decisions of adolescents and young people regarding their sexuality, using a participatory, intercultural, gender-sensitive and human rights approach. Comprehensive sexuality education should be provided in a diverse range of settings, including but not restricted to school, and recognize children and young people as the subjects of rights in accordance with their evolving capacity, as stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Declaration adopted at the Bali Global Youth Forum recommends that the rights of young people be upheld and be placed at the centre of the development agenda. Member States have an obligation to ensure that the social, economic, political, and sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people are addressed if the next generation is to be empowered to determine its own development outcomes. The International Planned Parenthood Federation contributes to this by having ensured that 4 out of 10 services provided in 2012 were to people under the age of 25.

*Gender and discrimination*

Investing in gender equality ensures healthier and more prosperous societies. When women have control over their bodies, access to education, decision-making roles and meaningful employment, and can live lives free of violence, they will be able to participate in the sustainable development of their communities. Addressing the root causes of inequality, aiming at gender parity at all levels and in all areas, is a means to eradicate poverty. The International Conference on Population and Development drew attention to the link between the position of women in society and their roles in marriage and relationships, sex and reproduction and how these

roles affect their health, wealth and well-being. Twenty years later, discrimination against women is still universal. Women generally earn less than men, and while 89.5 per cent of countries have legislation to support paid maternity leave, only 53.5 per cent have provisions for paternity leave, making it difficult to combine family and economic life.

In many parts of the world, moreover, individuals face discrimination, stigma and violence based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. Seventy-six countries have discriminatory laws that criminalize private, consensual same-sex relationships, exposing individuals to the risk of arrest, prosecution and imprisonment. In at least five of those countries, the death penalty is applicable. As recognized during the operational review, discrimination of any kind, including hate crimes, should be eradicated. The International Planned Parenthood Federation has developed and promoted a declaration of sexual rights, articulating principles that both rights holders and duty bearers must adhere to in order to build a world free from discrimination.

**Conclusion**

Moving beyond the International Conference on Population and Development review process, it is crucial that Governments continue to strengthen their efforts to ensure that all women and men, girls and boys, are empowered to make informed decisions about sex, relationships and reproduction. To make this happen, we call on Member States to implement the following three recommendations:

(a) Build on the successes of the International Conference on Population and Development operational review and prioritize the following issues in national policy, resource allocation and programming:

(i) Adolescents' access to sexual and reproductive health services and comprehensive sexuality education;

(ii) Access to contraception information, services and supplies and to safe and legal abortion services;

(iii) Universal access to sexual rights and reproductive rights, including measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence based on gender identity or sexual orientation;

(iv) Gender equality and the empowerment of women;

(b) Prioritize sexual and reproductive health and rights under a health goal and a stand-alone gender goal in the post-2015 development agenda. It is only when sexual and reproductive rights are realized and women and girls have control over their futures and bodies that development will be truly sustainable and meaningful;

(c) Ensure that national and regional accountability mechanisms, with clear time-bound targets, to oversee the fulfilment of the outcomes of the operational review of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development are put in place, with a clear time frame.